

Faith and Inspiration

Become a Professional Ice Skater or Christian in Three Steps

Step one: Resist the temptation to advance quickly. Learning the basics is important, even if it seems uncomfortable to tread the same small steps over and again. In the beginning, an ice skater may dream of quad loops and Y spins, those fancy jumps and step sequences that set a crowd ablaze with cheers.

But attempting such feats of skill too early will entail disheartening spills, a high risk of sprained ankles and bruised hips since the skater hasn't yet learned how to fall properly. Without knowing the basics, advanced skating feels impossible.

Paul shows that the journey of Christianity also has a beginning, a basics period full of small steps. He fed the Corinthians "milk, not solid food," since they were "people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ," not yet able to digest the mature issues of living for God (1 Corinthians 3:1-2 NIV).

A new Christian might not yet understand the basics, still learning about loving their neighbor as themselves, perhaps grappling with the reality that God chose to die for a corrupt world in order to restore it and bring himself glory. There are more complex spiritual problems—say, for example, the role of spiritual beings in our lives, or whether or not we can expect a command to "devote" a people "to complete destruction," such as how God commanded the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 20:17 ESV). Trying to tackle and digest these issues may be disheartening at best, perhaps damaging at worst, if we end up relying on our own understanding rather than on God's wisdom. We might even be driven away from the relationship, deciding it's "too hard" because the questions seem impossible to handle in the moment.

Ice skating is hard as well. The basics are important. March in place on the ice, bend the knees, push off to the side to glide. Only when these skills are mastered can a skater start thinking about the single loops and crossfoot spins,

not to mention the quads.

A Christian can read the Bible, talk with God, and talk to other

Christians. We shouldn't be afraid to ask questions. If some conundrum lies beyond our grasp and no explanation seems to make sense, maybe that's one of the "greater mysteries" that requires more maturity. Perhaps we need to hold off on that question, continue to grow, and attempt to digest it

later.

Step two: Actually attempting to digest that hard stuff later is key. Contentment is great, but not at the expense of growth. Perhaps someone feels content in the "milk" of Christianity, satisfied in their suckling. They feel filled up by "For God so loved the world" and "Jesus loves me," unwilling to learn about living in the Spirit, as Paul calls maturing Christians to do.

This is like the figure skater who, having mastered the glide, suddenly thinks they're an expert, done training, no need to learn anything deeper. That mindset might work for a casual skater, but it is detrimental to a future Olympian.

The best figure skaters keep practicing and pushing themselves just a little further each time, working their way up to greatness. Perhaps the best Christians, too, continue to practice for all their lives. The author of Hebrews admonishes us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV). To reach the prize at the end, we should not be content with just our milk. While it might not be advisable to gnaw on a T-bone steak with baby teeth, nibbling on mashed peas is a step in the right direction. Similarly, after mastering the forward glide, it's time for the skater to start skating backwards, or on one foot, or maybe even trying a hop.

Step three: Realize that falling does not mean defeat. If a skater tries that hop, they will fall. Guaranteed, their rump will hit the ice sooner or later. That can be a terrifying thing, perhaps even

paralyzing. I've only been ice skating once, and I know that when I tried to glide, my knees locked up just at the thought of possibly slipping back, face tipping to the ceiling, frozen in the knowledge that my breath would be knocked out of me.

There is a surefire way to ensure we'll never fall. Simply never try, and falling will never occur. But if we never try, we'll never grow, and never improving is a more detrimental issue. That's why it's important not only to practice skating, but to practice falling as well. There is proper technique even to messing up. A roll to the side, arms out of the way, with the hip's mass as the body cushion. A slide that reduces the chance of damage. Then the skater shifts to their knees and gets up one foot at a time.

When a Christian practices living in the Spirit and fails, the proper technique is repentance. Get caught in a lie? The temptation might be to keep on lying in order to save face. But we all fall, and accepting that is the best way to move forward. Roll the fall and ask for forgiveness.

Admitting our imperfections can hurt. Perhaps that's one reason why Romans says that "we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5 NIV). After a painful fall, the only way to grow is to get back up and try again. With the Spirit's help, the suffering now can build our endurance for later, help us to grow, and enable us to do better next time.

These three steps of mastering the basics, practicing, and repenting after the fall are not easy. Ice skating and building a relationship with Jesus aren't snap sports. They require time and dedication. It might seem simpler to give up and decide such skills are too difficult. But the rewards—to land a quad in competition, or to call God a friend and live through his Spirit—are worth the pain. Let us keep practicing, working to reach the prize of a mature relationship with our creator.



Luke Marshburn

Have you the



StatePoint - A lot changed about the since the Peace Corps was founded nearly decades ago, but its mission remains the same: to promote peace and friendship between Americans and people around the world. Established 59 years ago, the agency and its volunteers nationwide recently celebrated its anniversary.

The agency says for those looking to positively impact the world in a meaningful way, volunteering can be an exciting and challenging adventure that opens doors.

"Serving with the agency is an opportunity for Americans to use the skills they need in a global world," says Corps director, John Olsen.

Here are five interesting facts you may know about serving with Peace Corps:

- The majority of volunteers serve for two years following three months of in-country training. They live and work alongside the people they serve, collaborating with governments, schools, small businesses, and entrepreneurs to create sustainable, community-based projects that address local development priorities such as agriculture, community development, education, environment, health, and youth development sectors. Volunteers are free to choose what they want to apply to serve, and choose to serve where their skills are needed most.

- The Peace Corps was founded by President John F. Kennedy. To-date, more than 240,000 Americans have served in 142 host countries all across the world, including Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

Somerset Oaks Students help shelter dogs find homes

By Phil Marraccini

When librarian, Audry Marili found out about the success of attaching pictures of homeless animals on pizza boxes, she organized a select group of students at Somerset Oaks Academy. After brainstorming with the concerned students, an alternative plan was created... attaching pictures of homeless dogs and cats on bags of chips to be sold at school functions.



featured. Then, at their expense, pictures are printed and attached to

satisfaction can still be achieved without statistics!